

### Globalization of/in Latin America

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# *Globalization of/in Latin America*

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VÍCTOR FLORES OLEA AND ABELARDO MARIÑA FLORES, *Crítica de la Globalidad: Dominación y Liberación en Nuestro Tiempo* [Critique of Globality: Domination and Liberation in Our Time]. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000. 598 pp. ISBN: 9-68165-994-5.

NÉSTOR GARCÍA CANCLINI, *Latinoamericanos Buscando Lugar en este Siglo* [Latin Americans Seeking a Place in the Century]. Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2002. 120 pp. ISBN: 9-50126-405-X.

RICARDO J. GÓMEZ, *Neoliberalismo Globalizado: Refutación y Debacle* [Globalized Neoliberalism: Rebuttal and Debacle]. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Macchi, 2003. 216 pp. ISBN: 9-50537-601-4.

JOSÉ SEOANE AND EMILIO TADEI (eds), *Resistencias Mundiales de Seattle a Porto Alegre* [Global Resistances: From Seattle to Porto Alegre]. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2001. 208 pp. ISBN: 9-50923-160-6.

BERNARDO SORJ, *La Democracia Inesperada* [The Unexpected Democracy]. Buenos Aires: Bononiae Libris, 2005. 120 pp. ISBN: 9-87218-021-0.

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Most writers and readers interested in globalization operate within the English language. This is not surprising and reflects the English dominance in electronic communications and the network society more generally. Yet, if we are interested in global social policy in terms of how it impacts in Latin America, for example, much of the social science material will be in Spanish and Portuguese. It is as though the external world is an English one and the internal world is a Spanish/Portuguese one. This review article presents just a small sample of literature in Spanish on the globalization of and in Latin

America. It is in no way to be seen as a review of the literature but just as a taster for *GSP* readers who recognize the limitations of a global view based on English eyes and ears only. For ease of presentation I will present these books in fairly conventional terms, reflecting the economic, political and cultural aspects of globalization respectively, before reflecting in more general terms on what might be gained from an 'off-centre' view of globalization and its discontents.

Latin America operates, most often, as a radical reference point for the critical theories of globalization. It is after all where the World Social Forum originated (Porto Alegre), where indigenous presidents nationalize the oil industry (Bolivia) and where neo-liberalism's most spectacular failure occurred (Argentina). However, it is a quite abstract signifier for all things radical rather than a complex economic, political, social and cultural reality. Latin America might contest the juggernaut of neo-liberal globalization, but it does not figure as an architect in its construction. Colonial forms of power and knowledge seem more prevalent today than ever. The coloniality of power constitutes the planet and its continental division (including 'Latin America', that is of course not a unity) and articulates it with the production of knowledge (including what we call 'globalization'). Another way of putting this is that globalization looks and feels different from the perspective of subalternity. I am not suggesting a simple alternative composed of local histories and knowledge we can counterpose to the new global knowledge/power but I do think we need to be alert to border thinking in a spatial as well as interdisciplinary sense.

### *Economic (Dis)articulation*

Globalization has deeply affected the economic, political and cultural patterns of development in Latin America but it has done so in conjunction with national shifts in patterns of capital accumulation and political legitimation. During the first era of globalization (1870–1914) Latinamerican national economic policies were congruent with those of the 'open' world economy then prevailing. Following the international capitalist crisis of the 1930s and the disruption caused by the second inter-imperialist war up to 1945, most countries in Latin America embarked on a more nationalist and self-reliant economic course, the so-called national-development model. However, by the late 1970s and certainly in the 1980s, it became clear that this model was not consistent with world trends but was beginning to break down in its own terms. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the perceived failure of the national-development model more generally led to a reintegration into the world economy. The social disintegration and industrial decline consequent on this turn has not translated into a new economic model that is sustainable and politically viable. That is, it is the political economic disintegration that most of Latin America is now in which frames much of the debate on the economics of globalization.

*Crítica de la Globalidad* is not just a critique of globalization, but also a proclamation on 'domination and liberation in our time' as the subtitle indicates. The story of globalization and its impact in/on Latin America is situated within a broad history of the Enlightenment and the emergence of the liberal state. The restructuring of capitalism in the post-war era is tracked meticulously as is its impact on society and the world of work. There is also a substantial chapter on Mexico's neo-liberal globalization and current crisis. It is particularly strong on analysing the relationship and tensions between the crisis of the neo-liberal model and the process of political democratization. It emphasizes the cultural aspects and refuses a simple rejection of globalization. What it seeks is a critical understanding of the complexity of the processes of globalization. Where it differs from the standard Northern approaches, I believe, is in its emphasis on the relationship between the capitalist centre (North) and its peripheries (South). While not explicitly couched in these terms, this text revives the radical tradition of the dependency approach of the 1970s as a specifically Latinamerican take on global development processes.

*Neoliberalismo Globalizado* is in the Latinamerican tradition of an extended political essay. It is much more critical in the everyday sense of the word in its demolition job on the economic of Hayek and Friedman and the logic of Popper. The emphasis is on the myth of the value neutrality of neo-liberal economics doctrine. Globalization is seen as simply the rolling out of neo-liberal expansionism. Argentina in the 1990s used a case study for the empirical rebuttal of the neo-liberal case for development along free market lines. In reality, of course, the collapse of actually existing neo-liberalism in Argentina 2001 would convince even the managers of globalization that the model could not continue to work as was. Where this book stops is at the level of the debate in terms of the globalization of society and the search for an alternative development model. While understandable from the viewpoint of someone in the sinking ship of Argentina Inc., the global managers of the system had since learnt the lessons and moved on to construct a post-Washington consensus that, while showing continuity with the orthodoxy, was more flexible and therefore more viable.

Both books, in different ways, display a particularly Latinamerican approach to globalization. Certainly many of the reference points – both in terms of proponents of globalization and its critics – are similar to those we find in Northern texts and debates. There is a certain mirroring of metropolitan debates and often the analysis is derivative. There are language issues, with authors accessing English and/or French sources in particular ways. For example, a Latinamerican author oriented towards the USA would pick up on different debates compared to one who had UK reference points. Why these texts are different is because the issues found in Mexico, Argentina or Brazil (not to mention Bolivia, Ecuador or Peru) are quite different to those prevailing in the North Atlantic. Thus, for example, the varieties of capitalism debates and the nuances of New Labour splits in the UK have little interest

when one is taking up positions in terms of national economic survival. To my mind there is nothing yet available to match the originality and verve of the early dependency literature in the 1970s, with its advanced structural historical methodology (see Kay, 1989). Nationalism has still not been replaced by a coherent critical global approach to development and underdevelopment.

### *Political (Re)construction*

The turn towards the world market in Latin America was carried out under the aegis of military dictatorship from the Chilean coup of 1973 onwards. For a long time, there was a belief that inter-nationalization required repression. The strong state pioneered the removal of the state from its role in regulating the free market. Many achieved that task by the 1980s when political re-democratization went into full swing. Now it is democratic and even progressive political regimes that impose the policies of neo-liberal globalization. This democratic consolidation is, however, incomplete in many ways, with presidentialism still prevalent and the rule of law at best partial. The nature of democracy in Latin America is hotly contested. While we live in a post-authoritarian era, the quality of democracy is thin at best. Democratic consolidation has been partial really insofar as democratic principles and procedures do not reach deep down into society. Nationalism can no longer be the hegemonic social force it was insofar as the economic model is irrevocably tied to globalization. Precisely what national democracy means in Latin America today is thus uncertain.

Bernardo Sorj's book on the unexpected democracy that Latin America actually got after the dictatorship is an original one. Fully cognisant of the most recent western literature on democracy, citizenship, political representation and so on, it is firmly grounded in the complex reality of Brazil today. It is a political essay but there is nothing 'light' about it. The basic argument is that democracy has become consolidated in Latin America even if it is not the democracy we expected. Globalization is not seen as something entirely new, a *deus ex machina* descending on a placid social scene. Rather globalization developed in an intensely conflictual relationship in countries riven by poverty, inequality and political authoritarianism. Nothing 'means' the same here as in Europe, for example, whether we are examining citizenship issues, the role of the non-governmental organizations (Sorj is particularly good on them) or even what modernity means. Sorj concludes that the new global agenda – free market on one side, human rights on the other – turns the debate away from the nation state as a means of economic regulation and political representation and sees therein the danger of right-wing populist resurgence reclaiming the mantle of the nation.

As even a casual observer in the North would know, there is an active counter-globalization movement in Latin America and not just in the famous

forums of Porto Alegre. *Resistencias Mundiales* is part of a broad research and publishing initiative by the Latin American Social Observatory based at CLACSO (Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales – Latin American Social Science Council) easily accessed on the web (<http://www.clacso.org>). This book is largely designed to introduce the counter-globalization debates to Latin America, and so includes authors such as Samir Amin, Walden Bello, Alexander Cockburn, Francois Houtart and Ellen Meskins Wood. But the ‘local’ authors add a distinctive spin to a familiar story and the editors of ‘From Seattle to Porto Alegre’ are particularly good at ‘grounding’ the evolution of the counter-globalization movement in pre-existing struggles. A subsequent collection edited by Seoane (2000) focuses much more specifically on social movements in Latin America and how they are impacted by and impact on globalization. To put it at its most simple, not only does globalization look different from the South but so also does the ‘movement of movements’ that has emerged to contest its hegemony.

Latin America as a broad and contradictory continent plays an important role in the contestation of actually existing globalization. This is at the level of the World Social Forum but more importantly perhaps in terms of Brazil’s role in leading Southern resistance to the World Trade Organization’s neo-liberalization drive. Current social upheavals in Latin America, and above all the re-emergence of indigenous culture and resistance in the Andean countries, point towards new and more complex forms of opposition and construction of alternatives in the future. There is a move beyond the global agenda in that neither in its pro-business or anti-capitalist guise has it that much to offer in terms of a practical alternative in Latin America. There is a greater emphasis on strengthening the state and developing coherent national development and constitution strategies. Western observers would need to move beyond romanticized notions of the Zapatistas as the first information guerrillas and harbingers of the next global revolution, to examine critically the region in terms of the complexity of its reservoirs of creativity in terms of combining national, social and cultural forms of surpassing globalization.

### *Cultural (Re)imagination*

If the political economy of Latin America is inextricably bound up with development of the global system, the cultural life of Latin America has been much more independent and even precursory of global trends. There has been groundbreaking cultural activity in Latin America in relation to many ‘contemporary’ global cultural trends. Thus, for example, Jorge Luis Borges can conceivably be seen as an originator of postmodernism, something partially acknowledged by Foucault and Derrida at least. Post-colonial analysis has undermined the ontological security of the West, the margin figures as a key site of subversion, and even postmodernism can be seen as the revenge of the

periphery. A specific Latinamerican contribution to the debates around the 'posts' (colonialism, modernism, structuralism) has been around the issue of hybridity. Latin America's much debated heterogeneity, its diverse logics of development and simultaneous temporalities make it a seemingly natural object for anti-evolutionists' postmodern reflection.

Néstor García Canclini is the foremost Latinamerican cultural critic/anthropologist/sociologist who is best known in the North. Nevertheless, his *Latinoamericanos Buscando Lugar en este Siglo*, which is a bold programmatic statement for the continent, is not available in English. For García Canclini, the central tension of our era is 'between the promises of global cosmopolitanism and the loss of national projects' (p. 50). Latinamericans are becoming highly globalized as cultural agents, as migrants and as debtors. Regional integration projects are in crisis and each nation state is (re)negotiating its position in the world order. While the radical nationalist projects – in the political and cultural domains – have lost their purchase, nothing clear-cut has come to fill the gap. With a transnationalized political economy and culture, national identity lacks effectiveness and legitimacy. For García Canclini the way forward lies in the construction of a 'critical latinamericanism' centred on the democratic participation of citizens, promoting the multicultural expression of our societies, and exploiting the possibilities contained within globalization. Globalization is not a subject but a process in which various actors can intervene.

García Canclini's major work on 'Imagined Globalization' (García Canclini, 1999) has made a significant contribution to our understanding of the cultural political economy of globalization but, again, it remained in Spanish. In particular, through a detailed study of Latinamerican art and cultural industries, García Canclini explores the different modalities of globalizing, or, in other terms, going from European to US hegemony. Globalization was, for much of the 1990s, thought of as the inescapable destiny of modernity. We are now more driven to examine the variety of encounters and misencounters it provokes and facilitates. And, we do not all *imagine* globalization in the same way. For the company manager in São Paulo, Buenos Aires and Mexico City might well conceive of globalization in a direct and harmonious mode. However, for the multicultural migrant or artist, globalization appears in the *imaginary* as a tangential relationship. We may relate to those who speak the same language as us, practice the same disciplines as ourselves, or between countries focusing on the same problems. Circulation creates similarity but cultural differences are also generated and not as mere resistance to globalization's cultural reach.

Globalization has transformed the economics, political, social and cultural parameters of development in Latin America. The new global dimension challenges the cultural authority of the nation state. The state's ability to organize cultural identity is severely curtailed by the emerging global cultures. Not that we should overstate the global 'overdetermination' of local culture practices, as the work of García Canclini and many other cultural theorists in



Latin America have demonstrated. Today's fragmented and de-territorialized cultural forms and processes make it very difficult to achieve a coherent national cultural policy. But, Latin America has always/already been a hybrid cultural formation. The sedimentation and intermingling of indigenous traditions, colonial forms and modern communication and educational patterns, have made Latin America what it is today. While globalizing forces are certainly impacting on and transforming local cultural forms and practices, we can expect syncretism and hybridization and something distinctly 'Latinamerican' to emerge at the other end.

### *Global Projects/National Histories*

We can start summing up by exploring the distinction between the Spanish/Portuguese/French terms 'Globalización/Globalização/Globalization' and 'mundialización/mondialização/mondialization' that is lost in the simple English word 'Globalization'. The notion of 'worldness' gives a quite different inflection to our understanding and reading of the new global condition. Thus, Renato Ortiz (1997) distinguishes between economic and technological innovation on the one hand, and a cultural worldness on the other. Neo-liberal globalization is thus clearly conceived as a new western civilizing project and Latin America is destined to be 'globalized' in this sense. The local histories of Latin America are also part of another history of 'globalization' in which culture plays a dominant role and that is one that cannot be conflated with or subsumed under the cultural project of globalization. While the first is, indeed, the hegemonic disciplinary form of knowledge, it is constantly (and not least in Latin America) contested by other forms of knowledge and cultural development.

We do not need to buy into the whole 'cultural imperialism' approach to understand that the coloniality of power has a very real material effect when thinking about/in Latin America (Mignolo, 2000). Just by way of example we can mention two social science theories that originated in Latin America but which were then largely ignored and then co-opted and subsumed by western knowledge. The first was the concept of 'dependency' developed in the late 1960s as a Latin America counterpart to metropolitan theories of imperialism. While extremely fruitful as a lens through which to read the political economy of a dominated world region it only entered the western development debate when social theorists writing in English picked it up and ran with it. Another theoretical advance coming out of Latin America during that period was that of social 'marginality', which developed certain Marxist concepts around the notion of a surplus or a floating population beyond the 'reserve army of labour'. Current European interest in the concept of 'social exclusion' as an overarching paradigm for the social effects of globalization owes a lot to the concept of 'marginality' but by and large this is not acknowledged. This is



not a nationalist point but a stress on Europe's non-uniqueness in terms of global history. Both of these theories and the broader relationship to our understanding of development are examined in detail by Cristóbal Kay (1989) in a book itself largely ignored by 'Latinamericanists', the area-study epitomizing the coloniality of power.

Latin America, as object of study and position from which to study, allows us to rethink, I would argue, the relationship between the global designs of globalization and national histories. It does so in ways that are much more fundamental than recent western debates on the exaggerated demise of the nation state and the need to 'bring the state back in'. It is not an essentialist perspective based on spurious notions of authenticity that compels us to confront the colonizing 'foreign' cosmopolitanism of the globalization discourse. Latin America was always/already modern and even postmodern *avant la lettre* in its mixed temporality and cultural hybridity and *bricolage*. It is not a simple-minded nativist or traditionalist reaction to modernism that is creating the current wave of contestation of actually existing globalization in Latin America. What is questioned is the notion of Europe (or North America) as the place of theory with Latin America as the place of practice. The decolonizing of knowledge is probably as urgent in the era of globalization as it ever was.

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#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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